THE NUPE

TRIBAL AND SUB-TRIBAL GROUPINGS AND DEMOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

105 The Nupe, speaking a number of related dialects, number about 360,000, and consist of the inhabitants of Bida Emirate, Niger Province, together with several politically separate sections. They do not form a territorially united group and, although every Nupe should extend hospitality to his fellow-tribesmen, they are not characterized by close internal cohesion. There is considerable variety of custom among the various "sub-tribes." Outstanding common features are: the cycle of myths of the culture-hero Tsoede, the observation of the *gunnu* ritual, belief in the supreme sky-god Soko, and the general structure of political ranks, age-sets, kinship system, and marriage rules.[1]

NOMENCLATURE

101 The Nupe call themselves *Nupeciši* or *Nupenciši* (sing. *Nupeci* or *Nupenci*), their language *Nupe* or *Ezi Nupe*, and their country *Kin Nupe* ("the land of Nupe"). But Nupe in Zugurma and, generally speaking, north of the Kaduna River, also call themselves *Agabi*.[2] They are known by neighbouring tribes by the following names:[3]

By the Hausa: *Ba Nupe* or *Nufawa* (sing. *Nufe*).
" " Gbari of Kuta: *Abawa* (sing. *Bawa*).[4]
" " Gbari of Paiko and Birnin Gwari: *Ampeyi* or *Nife*.
" " Akanda (Yoruba): *Anupecwayi*.
" " Yoruba, Kambali, and Fon: *Tapa* or *Tapa* (*Tappah*).
" " Ijumu (Yoruba) and Igbira: *Anupe*.
" " Ebe (Nupe sub-tribe): *Anuperi*.
" " Lopawa: *Duma*.

LOCATION

131 The Nupe live in the low basin formed by the valleys of the Niger and Kaduna Rivers, between 9° 30′ and 8° 30′ north, in an area roughly 7,000 square miles in extent. Their northern boundary runs from Share (Tsaragi) to the Niger south of Baro; the western boundary is the Niger from Leaba to Jebba and south to Share; the eastern boundary is the line of the foothills east of Lapai and Gidi. Small sections of the Nupe are also scattered through Nigeria, especially in villages and towns on the Niger. The largest of these groups is that of the Basa or Basa Nge, in the north-west of Igala Division of Kabba Province opposite Lokoja.

131 The Nupe form the great majority of the population in the Bida and Agaie 167 Emirates of Niger Province, and in the Pategi-Lafiagi Emirate of Ilorin Province. There are also Nupe in the north-east of Ilorin and in the south of Borgu Emirate. They form a compact minority of the population in other chieftainships and political districts under the authority of Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbira chiefs, as follows: around Zugurma in the Kontagora Division of Niger Province, under the Hausa Emir of Kontagora; in Shona and Share Districts of Ilorin Province, under the

[1] Nadel, 1942, pp. 12–26; 1935a, pp. 278–9; Meek, 1925, Vol. I, p. 24. Thanks to the publications of Professor S. F. Nadel, based on intensive fieldwork in Bida Emirate and elsewhere in the thirties, it is possible to treat many aspects of Nupe culture and social organization more systematically and also more briefly than is the case for most of the peoples of the Niger-Benue confluence.
[2] Mathews, 1920.
[3] Nadel, 1942, p. 12; Temple, 1919, p. 282 and index.
[4] The Ebe sub-tribe is also called Abewa by Hausa speakers.

[pp. 1-16 Non-existent]

MAIN FEATURES OF ECONOMY

General

105 Most of the Nupe participate in a complex exchange-economy. Before the introduction of British money, cowrie shells were used as currency and are still used at funerals, and in reckoning marriage and other traditional payments.

The trans-Kaduna area and the country north of Bida (e.g., in Lemu), where land is fertile and plentiful, is the most prosperous. Wealth is greater where the household has a large labour unit or where a craft is practised in addition to farm work. Bida town exhibits greater extremes of poverty and wealth than the rest of the country but outstanding differences are not between individuals, but between groups, for example, urban and rural populations. It is said to be unusual to see badly-clothed men, women, or children, and under-nourishment is rare.

The traditional political offices are no longer inseparably linked with wealth, though high social status still attaches to them. Members of the *élite* can maintain their prestige fairly cheaply, as symbols of status (glazed turban or silver sword) are either heirlooms or not costly; the inherited house shows status even if in disrepair; polygyny is facilitated by the low marriage payment for "marriage in the family";[1] travelling can be sustained by claiming hospitality from relatives.[2]

Agriculture[3]

241 Nupe farming shows considerable technical knowledge and little magic or ritual is associated with it. Shifting cultivation is practised but plots are worked for 3–4 years (Doko), 4–5 years (Mokwa), and 6–7 years (Kutigi) before they are allowed to lie fallow for from 4 to 15 years. Rotation of crops is not generally practised, though Line reported it from the area round Jima, where three years of groundnuts were followed by two of guinea-corn. Intercropping is practised and two or three crops are often grown together. The size of a plot worked by one man is usually 2–2½ acres.

A large heavy hoe (*zuku*) is used for throwing up mounds and ridges, and a small hoe (*dugba*) for weeding and lighter work. A long bush knife (*gada*), nowadays of European manufacture, is used for cutting grain stalks and digging out yams.

Farms are cleared and burnt during the dry season. First-year cultivation after clearing is in mounds; those made for yams are 2–3 ft. high, 4–5 ft. apart, and in rows 6 ft. apart. Subsequent cultivation is in ridges 1 ft. high and 3 ft. apart. Groundnuts, sweet potatoes, and some vegetables are planted in this way. Marsh cultivation is carried out in small areas of 4–6 parallel ridges. Around Doko (Beni sub-tribe) manure is obtained from the cattle of nomad Fulani, who are invited to camp on fallow plots during the dry season.

184 241 In the area west of the Kaduna River the chief cash crop is groundnuts, and cotton also grows well there. The staple food crops are millet, sorghum, yams, and, to a lesser extent, rice. Cassava, maize, and sweet potatoes are less important. The most profitable commercial crops are rice, groundnuts, cotton, and shea-nut. There is a poorer range of crops round Bida town owing to the scarcity of land; fewer yams are grown there than elsewhere and there is no bulrush millet.

In the Nupe areas of Ilorin Emirate yams are not regarded as a Nupe crop but close contact with Yoruba farmers is said to have improved the Nupe methods of cultivation. In Share[4] each farmer has two farms, one for grain and the other for

[1] See below, p. 43.
[2] Nadel, 1942, pp. 339–65; Line, 1947.
[3] Nadel, 1942, pp. 205–14, 237–8; Line, 1947.
[4] Anon. 1934–5.

9:Nadel E-5 (1934-1935) 1935 FF52 Nupe FF52

sphere of influence of the *ledu*-organization, death penalty was executed, though in secrecy, by the people of the village themselves. But however this be, the actual issue is little affected. For even if there had existed this strong superstitious belief, the problem for us here is that it should be made use of in such a special way. The belief, the sentiments expressed in the belief, and the political institution in which they crystallise, are two entirely different things. The political system of Nupe kingdom, creating the *ledu*-organization, might actually only have adopted existing motives and ideas; but then it lent its own most sacred symbolism to their support, and at the same time formed out of their psychological appeal a rigid judicial monopoly, and a political office which almost comes to deny its origin: for the office of the *ledu* includes as we have seen also cases which have nothing more to do with death, namely the flogging of those who abused the name of the king; and ordinary flogging was done in every Nupe village.

III.

More than a hundred years of Mohammedan law, decades of civil war and political changes, were not powerful enough to break the spiritual influence of the *ledu* institution, the belief in its ordeals, and the sacredness of its office. But they have been able to obliterate certain details of its organization. One point in particular it is difficult to ascertain to-day: who was actually entitled to make use of the organization of 'Tsoede's hangmen'?

I found two different, and conflicting, interpretations. According to the first, the power of the *ledu* was limited to the river, and the authority over the *ledu* was, from Tsoede's time almost up till now, given into the hands of the chief of one section among the Nupe, the Kyedya. The people who call themselves Kyedya are the most powerful among the riverain Nupe. They are the canoe- and fishermen on the main river; they monopolize river traffic and trade, they look down upon their neighbours, and style themselves the 'Lords of the Waters.' They are united in a very strongly centralized political organization, and their head is the chief of Muregi, who holds the ancient hereditary title of *kuta*. The *kuta*, then, is said to be the legitimate head of the ledu organization. But a second version says that the office of the *ledu* comprised the whole country (or at least stretched inland as well), and that the power over the *ledu* belonged exclusively to the *etsu*, or kings, of the Nupe—the kings who were till the Fulani conquest the direct descendants of Tsoede.

Weighing evidence against evidence, the situation seems to be this:—Originally an organization of the Nupe king the *ledu* system was adopted later by the Kyedya. In the beginning the Nupe king alone was entitled to act through the *ledu* organization. Geographical and historical facts, reflected in the mythology of their ancestor-king, account for the connection with the river area: the territory of the young Nupe kingdom were the river banks. The river Niger, *nddádumo*, as the Nupe call it, 'Father Niger,' marks the path of the mythical Tsoede where he set out to unite the Nupe into a powerful kingdom. Even later, in historical times, when the Nupe state extended far across central Nigeria, the capitals always remained near the river: Gbara, Jima, Mokwa and Raba.[4] But also economically the Niger was the life centre of the country. The welfare of a large section of the population depended on the river. And traffic and trade, so immensely important in Nupe culture, were bound up with the Niger. What appears, then, in the context of myth as the path of the ancestor-king of Nupe, plays in the actual tribal life the rôle of a 'King's Highway,' of a vital artery of the political and economic organism over which the king extends his own special, sacred authority. Violation of the law in this area means the violation of this sacredness; and crimes committed here became crimes of a special sort, subject to a special jurisdiction which has the meaning more of a sacred vengeance than of an ordinary punishment.

When, however, during the Fulani wars the political centre moved away from the river, finally to Bida, the present capital of Nupe, the original organization of the *ledu* must have lost force and significance. And then it was, as our evidence points out, that the Kyedya claimed the title over the *ledu*. The power over the river was now theirs, unquestioned. The Kyedya, hostile to the Fulani invaders, always boasting with their ancient lordship over the waters, and regarding themselves still in the days of British rule as equal to the king of Bida, seized this organization which seemed a

[4] *See* the map in my article on *Nupe State and Community* (AFRICA, VIII, 3).

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Identification

The Nupe, who embrace the Beni (Bini), Batachi, Kede (Kyedye), Nupe Zam, Ebagi, Ebe (Abewa), Gbedye, Kupa (Gupa), Cakpang, Kusopa, Benu, Dibo (Ganagana, Zitako), Gwagba, and Kakanda (Akanda, Hyapa), belong to the Nupe branch of the Kwa sub-family of the Niger-Congo linguistic stock, along with the Gbari, Idoma, Igala, Igbira, and Nge. They number about 360, 000 (Forde, 1955) on 17, 000 square miles. They are definitely Negroid in physical type, though the upper classes are mixed with Fulani. The Nupe state goes back to about 1400, judging from traditional genealogies, and reached its apex between 1760 and 1795. It was infiltrated by nomadic and town Fulani, then conquered by the Fulani and attached to the emirate of Gwandu around 1820. Meek says that Ibn Batuta reported Nupe as a powerful kingdom in 1352.

Basic Economy

Primarily agricultural, with shifting hoe cultivation, fallowing, and some crop rotation, irrigation, and use of animal manure. The staple crops are millet (bulrush millet and "late" millet) and sorghum, followed by yams and maize. Groundnuts, beans, sweet potatoes, and rice are also moderately important, and some gourds, pumpkins, melons, onions, red peppers, red sorrel, bananas, cotton, manioc (introduced in 1910), sugarcane, mangoes (recent), hemp (recent), and henna (recent) are also grown. Cattle of a dwarf humped variety were formerly fairly numerous, then came a shift to a zebu type tended by slaves and Fulani, and finally practical abandonment since the abolition of slavery. Butter and milk are not used. Numerous goats, dogs, and chickens (eggs not eaten) are kept, as well as a fair number of sheep, some horses and pigeons, and a few donkeys, but no pigs. Fishing is important in riverain regions, and there is much gathering of shea, kola, and oil-palm nuts, but hunting is of little consequence. Trade is important, and there are regular markets.

Sex Division of Labor

Men gather palm and kola nuts, but women gather shea nuts and other wild products. Men tend livestock and do most of the agricultural work, though women may assist in harvesting, especially with root crops. Women do most of the market trading.

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Property

Cowries were formerly used as currency. Basically, land is owned collectively by the headman in heritable but inalienable usufruct to men only. Such rights may be leased for life or for indefinite periods for a down payment plus a fixed rent. There is also hereditary tenancy on a share-crop basis and the ceding of absolute rights to lands gained by conquest or appropriation in return for political services; these two types of tenure are the basis for the feudal political organization.

Land is inherited by the next younger Br, then ElSo (both classificatory and own), along with headship in the extended family. Personal property is divided among ElSo, younger sons, full brothers, and daughters in decreasing proportions.

Social Stratification

Slavery and debt slavery (pawning) were formerly common, and the slave trade flourished. Slave status was hereditary in the female line; the child of a slave father and free Mo was free, one by a free father and slave Mo was a slave (but could be redeemed by the Fa). Social classes are well developed: royalty, nobility (with considerable gradation in titles), freemen (of various occupations and levels of wealth), and slaves. Interclass mobility is possible by marrying into a higher class or status level; in such cases the children take the status of the higher-ranking parent. There are guilds of smiths, weavers, glassmakers, and other craft skills.

Marriage

A substantial bride-price in money (formerly c. 12,000 cowries) is customary except in the upper classes, where it is low to foster class endogamy. It is provided by the extended family head for an ElSo; younger sons must provide their own, with assistance from relatives. Temple but not Nadel mentions periodic premarital bride-service in addition to the bride-price. A woman can formally marry another woman in the role of a female husband.

Polygyny is general and preferred. A survey of 2 villages showed 68 men with one wife, 96 with two, and 35 with three or more. The first wife is chief wife, and each co-wife has her own hut. Secondary marriages are preferred with ElBrWi, allowed with FaWi and MoBrWi, forbidden with YoBrWi.

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Family

The normal residential unit is a patrilocal extended family, occupying a compound within which smaller patri-families, polygynous families, or nuclear families form distinct sections. If a compound is crowded, a part of the family may split off to establish a new compound, which for a time is part of the old "house" but eventually becomes independent. The extended family has a patriarchal head.

Residence

Patrilocality prevails. As boys approach puberty they move into a separate hut in the patri-family compound. Temple but not Nadel reports that the first-born child always goes to live with its grandfather as soon as weaned.

Kin Groups and Exogamy

Local exogamy is reported for the Dibo and Kupa, local agamy for the Nupe in general.

Fulani-Nupe of the upper class, following Moslem usage, favor parallel cousin marriage, which is strictly forbidden in other classes. Cross-cousin marriage is inferentially permitted by all Nupe.

The male core of a patrilocal extended family, together with their sisters, form a patri-lineage. The lineage is not exogamous, at least in the upper classes. There is a vague feeling that the residents of a village are patrilineally related and form an indefinite sort of patri-sib. The three royal lineages are also incipient patri-sibs.

Kinship Terminology (Koelle)

Fa, FaElBr--nda, ada (Kakanda). Mo--nna, onyi (K). So, BrSo--egi, ozi (K). Da--egi isaki. ElBr, ElSi, FaElBrCh--yaya, nugudsi, odsoku (K). YoBr, YoSi, FaYoBrCh--goasuma, owuri (K). Wi--isagi, anye (K).

GrFa--ndako, ohikua (K). GrMo--nnako, onkua (K). FaYoBr--"little Fa." Nadel says the kinship system is in general of the generation type.

Settlement Pattern

The Nupe live in settled communities, of which only two exceed 1,000 population. A settlement consists of a cluster of walled patri-family compounds or "wards" separated from each other by open land or cultivated fields. Only rarely, especially on river banks, are the

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compounds or hamlets grouped into compact villages with narrow thoroughfares between them; these were formerly often walled. Dwellings are round with mud (sometimes grass) walls and conical thatched roofs.

Community Organization

The local community is a sort of indefinite agamous patri-clan. There are functional age-grades. Boys are circumcised at 6-7, but clitoridectomy is reported only for the Kakanda.

Local Government

Each village is governed by a headman and a council of elders consisting of the heads of the component patri-families. Of these, two or three of outstanding prestige form an executive council, which makes most decisions. Succession to these offices is by promotion in some regions (the senior elder becoming headman, etc.) and by heredity in others (by the YoBr or ElSo who succeeds to the headship of the patri-family in which the office is vested).

State

The Nupe have a monarchical feudal state ruled by a paramount chief or king. Succession rotates among three royal patri-lineages. The king is assisted by titled court officials, by provincial governors and district chiefs, and by personal attendants. He rules directly from the capital district of Bida and the provinces of Beni and Kede. The outlying districts are semi-independent and are governed by feudal governors appointed by the king from among his relatives, courtiers, and favorites. They collect tribute from local headmen, provide for the ruler, his court, and the army, and are liable for military service.

Warfare

There are wars of conquest and civil wars over disputed succession.

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Identification

The Nge (Basange, Bassa-Nge) belong to the Nupe branch of the Kwa sub-family of the Niger-Congo linguistic stock. They are an offshoot of the Nupe who fled to escape Fulani conquest. They numbered 19, 200 in 1931. They are basically pagan, but are gradually accepting Islam today.

Basic Economy

Primarily agricultural, presumably similar to the Nupe.

Marriage

Connived abduction is practiced.

Community Organization

Clitoridectomy is customary.

Local Government

There are village headmen.

Warfare

Headhunting was formerly practiced, but not cannibalism.

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41:Nadel P,E-5 (1934-1936) 1937
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The present study can only claim to be a first attempt in field experiments of this kind, carried out under conditions which did not allow a more extensive investigation. Yet the question could be raised how far the evidence obtained in experiments which were carried out on so small a scale and in so special a setting can be considered significant and representative of the culture at large. In order to secure a representative group I selected for my experimental subjects students who came from a great many different places in Nupe and Yoruba respectively. The two experimental groups were matched as closely as possible with regard to age, school standard and the surroundings from which they came. In Nupe I was able to work with larger groups: with 60 boys of the age of 12–18 who were taken from every school form, i.e. who had been students of the Middle School for periods varying from 1 to 5 years. Now, as I shall show later, the experiments admit to a certain extent of statistical interpretation, i.e. the responses to certain essential features in the story or the pictures can be classified and treated quantitatively. This statistical evidence allows us to gauge the extent to which the 20 Yoruba subjects can be considered a significant and representative sample. I found that the means for the various responses calculated for the small group correspond very closely to the means arrived at for the large group; in other words, there exist no unequally distributed marked individual differences which would invalidate the results obtained among the small group. Since school standard and age do not correspond very closely in Nigerian schools, the statistical evidence can moreover be used to check independently the influence of age and educational standard. As regards the age factor, we find a slight rise in the appreciation of factors of reasoning and emotional facts corresponding to age; a fairly unchanged appreciation of situational facts; and a fall in the appreciation of moral ideas from the age of 13–15. More important for this investigation is the educational factor; here the statistical evidence proves conclusively that the difference in educational standard has no influence on the psychological responses and attitudes examined in these experiments.

III. THE CULTURE DIFFERENCES

Before going into details I must say a few words about the two cultures and the nature of their diversity. The two groups speak different languages which, however, belong to the same linguistic group (of so-called *Sudanic* languages). Their economic system and their general social organization are similar. Yet other aspects of their culture, aspects which may be held to express more specifically psychological trends or tendencies,[1] reveal a fundamental difference. The religion of the Yoruba is characterized by an elaborate and rationalized hierarchical system of deities, each of which has its specific, specialized duty and function. The Nupe have no such system; their religious beliefs centre round a concept of magic of the 'mana' type, i.e. vague, abstract, impersonal power. In the rich, highly developed realistic art of the Yoruba the main *motif* of pictures, plastics and wooden images is the human figure; religious and mythical emblems of this kind play an important part in their life. Again,

[1] See my article on "The Typological Approach to Culture"(4).

41:Nadel P,E-5 (1934-1936) 1937
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the Nupe have nothing of the sort, their art is imageless, they have but crude wall paintings, and their strength lies in ornamental, decorative art. Also the Yoruba have a strong sense for pantomime and drama, for which again there is no parallel among the Nupe.

IV. The story experiment

The story was read to the students at 8 a.m., i.e. during their first class. At noon they were asked to relate the story for the first time (each boy by himself) and after one week for the second time. Each time the leader of the experiment wrote down the story as it was told. The story (in free translation) runs as follows:

> Long, long ago there were a man and his wife. They had two children, sons. When these sons had grown up, they saw a beautiful girl. They both made friends with her, and loved her very much. They loved her with one heart. But the girl did not love the elder brother, she only loved the younger. Thereupon the elder brother went to the younger and told him to give up the girl. He said: "I am the one to marry the girl for I am your elder brother." Thus he spoke. But the younger refused. They quarrelled a great deal till the elder brother became furious. When the night fell he went to the hut where the younger brother was sleeping and killed him with his sword, he killed him with one stroke. When the people heard the news they said: "He did an evil deed, God will revenge it." But the girl cried, she cried for twenty days and her heart was full of pain. When she had finished crying she left and went to another place. Nobody saw her again.

The responses which the contents and structure of the story evoke in the experimental subjects can be analysed under four or five different headings: There are points in the story which stress emotional reaction; points which bear on moral ideas; and points which appeal more specifically to reasoning, i.e. crucial points in the logical progress of the narrative. The text also contains certain set phrases and formulae; and, finally, a number of situational or circumstantial details. Obviously, these different categories in which the features of the narrative can be grouped must overlap to a certain extent. But it is just this overlapping, the application of different and even divergent aspects of interpretation to the same features, which will reveal to us most strikingly the different psychological attitudes with which the two groups approach the data presented in the narrative.

(1) *Set phrases and formulae*

The beginning and the end of the narrative, and one or two other phrases, represent more or less fixed formulae typical of all such stories. These phrases were in most cases repeated literally, both by Nupe and